

Apathy Created Hitler Era And Watergate, Doctor Says

When Hilgunt Zassenhaus says greatness and divinity are inherent in the human race, she can not be passed over as just another sentimental middle-aged woman.

A practicing physician in Towson, Dr. Zassenhaus received a Nobel Prize nomination in March for her work in Germany during World War 2.

The book which grew out of her experiences, "Walls," chronicles the life of a young German citizen who chose to put her own conscience above the dictates of the Nazi state.

"My experiences confirmed my belief that the conscience of an individual is much higher than any law," said Dr. Zassenhaus. "Each and every one of us has the chance to listen to the highest order of his conscience."

Dr. Zassenhaus was the German guard who accompanied representatives of Scandinavia in their monthly visits to Scandinavian political prisoners. Instead of limiting aid given by those representatives, Dr. Zassenhaus helped supply it.

She smuggled in bread, which she baked at home, letters and vitamins. Although informed in advance that religious observance was forbidden, she let the Norwegian or Danish representatives read from the Bible and "we all prayed."

Her final service to the prisoners was to notify the Swedish Red Cross when Hitler, in his last days of power, issued an order for the execution of the prisoners. Using files she had compiled on them, the Swedish Red Cross was able to locate each man and save his life.

"Thirty years ago, I thought what hap-

pened could only have happened in Germany," said Dr. Zassenhaus, who moved to the United States 22 years ago. "Now I know the same thing could happen anywhere."

"The culprit is apathy.

"Few people will ever commit themselves," said Dr. Zassenhaus. "They aren't for or against anything. They just remain indifferent. NEWS AMERICAN

"Most German people were not Nazis because of their convictions, but because they had none. They did not help Hitler, they just let him happen."

"You and I are not indifferent," said Dr. Zassenhaus in the soft German accent she still carries with her. "We must ask ourselves does a certain action affirm life? Just that one question. And then we must act on our answer.

"I don't care' is the ugliest phrase," said Dr. Zassenhaus.

The tangle of scandals labeled Watergate is a more current abuse of the power people have to let things happen. "It's another example of the Nazis' philosophy that the end justifies the means," said the physician.

But the accused individuals are only part of the story.

"We should put the blame where it belongs," said Dr. Zassenhaus. "on ourselves."

"It just proves to me that we need to begin again to search for a new set of values. We have to begin to care . . . who our Congressmen are."

This is not the first time Dr. Zassenhaus has been corned about the direction of

American government. When she first began her hospital work after arriving in this country, she requested a week off almost immediately to go to Washington where they were having the McCarthy hearings.

"I could not believe they should begin to go through here, in this land of liberty, what they had just gone through before the war in my native country," said Dr. Zassenhaus.

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But Dr. Zassenhaus found cause for hope in the Watergate morass.

"Two reporters discovered it first. Two individuals — and because of them we will have a housecleaning in government. Don't you think that's great?"

Basically all people are the same. "They have the same joys, hurt, pain and they have the same greatness," said the woman who has witnessed so much seemingly to the contrary.

In her book, she tells how her family's house became a fortress, an island of resistance against the Hitler machine.

"Hate and prejudice are the things people have to fight," said Dr. Zassenhaus. "In this respect the war never really ended."

Asked if she ever thought herself to be a hero, Dr. Zassenhaus replied without hesitation, "Never."

She only lived life day to day according to her conscience, she said, and that can be done as a physician, a war heroine or as a taxi driver.

"It isn't necessary to admire what I say," said Dr. Zassenhaus, smiling. "Just apply it."